

Year 1:

Unit 4

The Second American Revolution - The Constitution (1787 - 1788): Introduction

Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?

Agendas for redefining American society in the post-Revolutionary War era differed widely. After a dramatic ideological debate in 1787 and 1788, the matter was finally settled by one of the greatest political compromises in human history: the U.S. Constitution. However, the Constitution was not the United States' first form of government. Immediately following the war, the United States enacted the Articles of Confederation, which established a loose confederacy of the 13 states and respected the almost complete sovereignty of each state. The Articles proved to be ineffective, leading to financial panic and chaos, with the federal government lacking real power to stop it. In the midst of all of this, a group of delegates from each of the 13 states convened at the Philadelphia Convention to revise the Articles. Instead, these delegates spent weeks debating, arguing, and compromising in order to create a new government based upon the Constitution.

At the convention, delegates debated issues ranging from individual rights to representation and the role of an executive. While many Americans feared the chaos that ensued as a result of a weak federal government under the Articles of Confederation, many more still feared the dangers of a tyrannical government, with memories of the Revolution fresh in their minds. In the end, the delegates finally came to an agreement on a Constitution made up of compromises that worked to balance liberty and security. However, many Americans did not support the Constitution; a large wave of Antifederalists challenged the extent to which the Constitution prioritized the rights of nonelite Americans and demanded a Bill of Rights as a further safeguard against tyranny. Thus it was agreed that a Bill of Rights would be added to the Constitution, and by 1790, all 13 states had ratified the document.

The Constitution of 1787 and the Bill of Rights are the culmination of the most creative era of constitutionalism in American history. Yet many issues remained unsettled. The Constitutional Convention sidetracked the movement to abolish slavery that had risen in the revolutionary era. Many ordinary Americans — including women, poor Americans, and free African Americans — lacked political

voice and power in the government, their rights not represented by the Constitution. And ratification of the Constitution did not end the debate on governmental power or how to create “a more perfect union.” Economic, regional, social, ideological, religious, and political tensions would spawn, continuing debates over the meaning of the Constitution for generations of Americans. Despite the imperfections in its implementation and reach, the Constitution remains the foundational document upon which our country operates. The Bill of Rights laid the groundwork for the power of Americans to continue to amend the Constitution for centuries to come in order to continue defending and defining the rights and liberties of all Americans.

Unit 4 Learning Goals

Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 4 Essential Question: *To what extent did the new Constitution represent all Americans?*

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 4 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas that scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 4, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 4 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards United States History Era 3.

- **Big Idea 1: After the American Revolution, civil unrest amid an economic depression, new taxes, and piling debt underscored the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and led to new calls for a stronger national government.**
 - Following the American Revolution, the new nation united under the Articles of Confederation, which established a “firm league of friendship” among the 13 new states with little centralized authority.
 - The Articles of Confederation did not provide the new government with adequate power to tax or raise money, resulting in a money shortage that affected Americans across the new nation. As a result, disgruntled Americans united together to protest this lack of money at Shays’ Rebellion, forcing the new nation to reconsider how it would organize its new government.

- **Big Idea 2: At the Constitutional Convention, delegates from each state debated over how to increase federal power while protecting the sovereignty of states and individual liberties, forcing delegates to compromise in order to create and ratify the Constitution.**
 - Large states and small states clashed over issues of representation in the legislature. Ultimately, a compromise was struck between large and small states, with the establishment of a lower chamber, the House of Representatives, to be determined by a state’s population, and an upper chamber, the Senate, to have equal representation across states.
 - The new states also feared the threat of tyranny, having just rebelled against the tyrannical British throne. As a result, the framers created three branches of government, with a system of checks and balances to ensure that no single branch of government could claim too much power.
 - Despite the interests of some delegates to rid the United States of the institution of slavery, the framers ultimately compromised with Southern states in order to create the Constitution.

- Once the new Constitution was created, many Americans believed that it did not go far enough in protecting the rights of individuals. The Antifederalists wrote pamphlets to protest the ratification of the Constitution, and in response, supporters of the Constitution, the Federalists, attempted to encourage national support.
 - To gain the support of the Antifederalists and ratify the Constitution, the Federalists compromised by adding the Bill of Rights to the Constitution as the first ten amendments, guaranteeing the basic rights of all citizens. The Bill of Rights has endured as an essential protection of individual liberties throughout American history.
- **Big Idea 3: While the Constitution guaranteed Americans basic rights and liberties, it did not extend many of these rights and liberties to most ordinary Americans, who remained disenfranchised — or enslaved — after ratification.**
- Despite the calls for liberty during the American Revolution, the framers ultimately compromised on the matter of slavery, protecting the institution of slavery with the Three-Fifths Compromise, the Fugitive Slave Clause, and its 20-year protection of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.
 - Many ordinary Americans — including poor Americans, free black Americans, and women — were excluded from participation in the government and were not fully represented in the new Constitution.

Key Terms

The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.

- Northwest Ordinance
- Articles of Confederation
- Shays' Rebellion
- Constitutional (Philadelphia) Convention
- U.S. Constitution
- Delegates/framers
- James Madison
- Proportional representation
- Great Compromise/Connecticut Compromise
- Tyranny
- Checks and balances
- Separation of powers
- Federalism
- Three-Fifths Compromise
- Fugitive Slave Clause
- Federalists
- Antifederalists
- Ratification
- Bill of Rights
- Suffrage

Geography

The following places are foundational to understanding the geographical context of the unit. As you teach Unit 4, continually reference maps in class, not only to build scholars' fluency with geography but also to develop their geographic reasoning skills as they grapple with the Big Ideas of the unit.

- **Free and Slave states before 1800:**
 - **Free states (with an enslaved population between 0 and 20 percent):** New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware
 - **Slave states (with an enslaved population greater than 20 percent):** Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky
- **The six most populous states before 1800:** Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina
- **Major regions surrounding the United States:** the Northwest Territory, Florida (East and West), Spanish North America, and British North America

Intellectual Preparation

Class Materials Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful you must study all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 4 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 4 Workbook](#)

Additional Resources The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 4:

- Review the timeline “The New Nation (1783–1815)” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Read the essays “The New Nation” and “Creating a New Government” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Watch the following videos: “Crash Course History: The Constitution, the Articles, and Federalism” and “Crash Course Government and Politics: The Constitutional Compromises,” available on YouTube.

*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

Unit 4 Lesson Sequence

Essential Question: To what extent did the new Constitution represent all Americans?

The first two lessons introduce scholars to the complex impact of the American Revolution on the new nation and the government — based on state sovereignty and individual freedoms — that was established in the wake of the war. Lesson 1 illustrates the new nation, its boundaries, and its new government for scholars, and scholars will understand how this new government — under the Articles of Confederation — established a loose union of mostly independent states, with little uniting them in the years immediately following the war. In Lesson 2, scholars will examine the challenges this new government faced and will be able to explain how the Articles of Confederation’s lack of central authority ultimately challenged its ability to govern effectively and protect the will of the people, as illustrated by Shays’ Rebellion. By the end of these two lessons, scholars will understand why the Articles of Confederation ultimately failed, and they’ll be prepared to examine the new system of government that was established in its place: the U.S. Constitution.

Lesson 1: A New Nation (Map Study)

- **Central Question:** How did the American victory in the Revolution reshape North America?

Lesson 2: The Disunited States (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did Daniel Shays lead a rebellion in 1786?

In Lessons 3 through 5, scholars will examine the framers’ major debates and compromises in creating the Constitution. In Lesson 3, scholars will simulate the debate over state representation and understand why states disagreed over how to balance state representation in the new national government and how the framers established the House of Representatives and Senate as a compromise. In Lesson 4, scholars will examine the system of three branches of government established by the Constitution in order to understand how these branches were intended to establish a system of checks and balances on each branch to protect against tyranny. Lesson 5 introduces scholars to the Constitutional debate over slavery, and scholars will examine why the framers ultimately chose to protect slavery in the Constitution. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand the key debates held over rights and representation during the Constitutional Convention and will be prepared to examine the new challenges faced in order to ratify the Constitution.

Lesson 3: The Road to Philadelphia (Simulation)

- **Central Question:** Why did Americans disagree about representation in a new national government?

Lesson 4: Safeguards Against Tyranny (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did the new Constitution balance the power of the federal government?

Lesson 5: Slavery and the Constitution (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did the framers protect slavery in the Constitution?

Lessons 6 through 10 consider the challenges the nation faced in order to ratify the new Constitution. In Lessons 6 through 8, scholars will examine why a number of Americans, known as Antifederalists, challenged the new Constitution, and they will examine the extent to which this new Constitution truly protected the rights of Americans. To appease the Antifederalists, the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution, and Lessons 9 and 10 explain the key protections of basic rights for all Americans — such as the freedom of speech or the right to a fair trial —

established by these ten amendments. After these lessons, scholars will understand how the new nation successfully compromised in order to ratify the Constitution, establishing a government that, in theory, prioritized individual rights, and they will be prepared to further explore the Americans whom the new government failed to protect.

Lessons 6–8: Federalists and Antifederalists (DBQ Writing)

- **Central Question:** To what extent did the new Constitution protect the rights of Americans?

Lessons 9–10: The Bill of Rights (Jigsaw, PBL)

- **Central Question:** How does the Bill of Rights protect individual and state rights?

In the last two lessons of the unit, scholars will grapple with the significance of the new Constitution for all Americans. Not only did the slavery clauses — as discussed in Lesson 5 — protect slavery in the new nation but the Constitution actually represented only a small portion of the population. In Lessons 10 and 11, scholars will explore the perspectives of the Americans not represented, ranging from poor Americans to women, in order to understand the limitations of Constitutional representation. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand that despite the many compromises established to protect and promote individual liberties, the Constitution failed to fully represent the majority of Americans, who remained powerless in American government.

Lessons 11–12: Whose More Perfect Union? (Gallery Walk, Simulation)

- **Central Question:** To what extent did the Constitution reflect the will of the common people?